

Stewardship Leaders in Agriculture

Diverse Land Use

Burrows Ranch

Bill and Kay Burrows are fifth generation ranchers with a 3,500-acre family ranch west of Red Bluff, California. Mr. Burrows attended University of California Davis and spent 35 years developing the Agriculture and Natural Resources Program at Shasta College while also operating the family ranch. In today's cattle business a rancher has to be able to run about 500 head to make a living, but the Burrows Ranch only has room for 150 cattle. A holistic management decision-making process converted the ranch from a cattle operation to a diversified cattle, agritourism, carbon sequestration, and land conservation business that uses cattle as well as meat goats and sheep for brush control.

Harvesting Sunlight

After losing money for seven consecutive years and watching neighbors go bankrupt, the Burrows knew that 1985 would have to be different if the operation was to be saved. That year the Burrows were introduced to a new decision-making process called holistic management. It was a revolutionary way of thinking that focused on the ranch's economic viability, social responsibility, and environmental stewardship. With a new mindset that saw his land as not only range for cattle but as a sun powered natural resource generator the Burrows were able to return to profitability within two years. With only 20% of their income from grass-fed cattle and livestock, a thriving agritourism business, a successful carbon sequestration program, and wetlands program for migrating birds and a management plan that utilizes cattle, as well as goats and sheep for brush control, make up the large majority of the Burrows' income.

"There are probably a thousand things we could do to make a profit, but we only choose the ones' that support the quality of life that our family enjoys."

- Bill Burrows



ACHIEVEMENTS

- In 2010, the Burrows protected 3,346-acres of their ranch in a conservation easement
- Planting of perennial grasses has increased the dry root mass of certain areas by more than 450%, which indicates large gains in carbon sequestration
- Mr. Burrows is the coordinator of a 40,000-acre Coordinated Resource Management Plan
- The Burrows were 2009 and 2010 Leopold Conservation Award Finalists



CONSERVATION EASEMENT

In December 2010, the Burrows finalized a 3,460-acre conservation easement through the Northcoast Regional Land Trust that encourages agricultural production, cattle grazing and habitat protection, and directly supports a diversified and vibrant agriculture and agro-tourism operation forever protecting the land from development and subdivision. The easement includes thousands of acres of blue oak woodland and savannah, as well as annual grassland, working farmland, chamise-redshank chaparral, spring-fed wetlands, intermittent and perennial streams, riparian habitat along Red Bank Creek and North Fork Elder Creek, scenic open space, and habitat supporting several special-status species including valley elderberry longhorn beetle, foothill yellow-legged frog, and California red-legged frog. The project is also contiguous with land owned by the Bureau of Land Management and Mendocino National Forest, providing an essential buffer to help prevent the area from being compromised by incompatible land use. Funding for the purchase of the conservation easement was provided by the California Wildlife Conservation Board's Oak Woodland Protection Program.

PROJECT PARTNERS

California Cattlemen's
Association

California Department of
Fish and Game

California Fire

California Wildlife
Conservation Board's Oak
Woodland Protection
Program

Defenders of Wildlife

Multiple Use Managers, Inc.

Natural Resources
Conservation Service

Partners for Fish and
Wildlife

The Nature Conservancy

PROJECT DETAILS

DIVERSE LAND USE

With only 20% of the Burrows Ranch income coming from grass-fed cattle, the ranch relies a diverse sustainable use of its natural resources for the majority of its income. Agritourism such as paid hunting opportunities are provided through the Multiple Use Managers outfitting company for blacktail deer, wild boar, wild turkeys, quail, and doves. Bass are kept in the livestock ponds, and Mr. Burrows even sells a Huckleberry Finn Fishing kit complete with willow pole and grasshoppers. Goats are used to help manage fire safety and improve wildlife productivity. The reintroduction of native perennial plants and the utilization of biodiversity to improve the health of the land without using off-farm products or large numbers of man hours allows the ranch to be profitable and sustainable. By converting existing annual grassland to native perennial Perlagrass 3-10 times more forage more acre is produced. This land use conversion traps significantly more carbon and forms the ranches carbon sequestration program. The Burrows worked with the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Natural Resources Conservation Service to study the carbon sequestration capacity of Perlagrass and found that it expanded the dry root mass from 652 lbs/acre for the annual grassland to 28,314 lbs/acre for the Perlagrass.

EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

Mr. Burrows is the coordinator for a 40,000-acre Coordinated Resource Management Plan (CRMP) in which 65 landowners and agency personnel have come together to develop a goal of making the chaparral belt land and associated areas more productive and safe for the social, financial, and environmental needs of the temporary stewards of the land. Trained in Holistic Management, Mr. Burrows has been a keynote speaker and has given seminars throughout the Western United States and three countries in Africa. The Burrows have hosted the Tehama County Resource Conservation District's annual Stewardship Day, where attendees learn about fire suppression, livestock management and other techniques that reduce the human impact on natural resources, on 21 occasions.